

I was not always supportive of medical marijuana. What changed my mind was hearing testimonials from suffering people who had turned to medical marijuana for relief. The choice to use medical cannabis for treatment was often a decision made when all other treatments had failed, when patients and families alike had lost hope.

I have seen families in the throes of grief at their loved ones' illnesses—including parents who watched their children with epilepsy suffer from daily, debilitating seizures. Every day brought a new heartbreak, until medical cannabis finally brought patients and families some much-needed relief. For many patients, this was the first relief from their symptoms that they had felt in many years.

But while some patients discover medical cannabis after research, many patients do not know, or even consider, that medical marijuana may help their conditions.

AMMPA, the American Medical Marijuana Physicians Association, has been instrumental—particularly in Florida—in raising patients' awareness of medical cannabis as a valid treatment option. They have helped many find relief when other treatments had not worked.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the United States Congress, I want to recognize the Board of Directors of the American Medical Marijuana Physicians Association, and to thank them for their good work.

#### HONORING NORTH SUNFLOWER MEDICAL CENTER

#### HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 29, 2018*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a remarkable organization, North Sunflower Medical Center.

North Sunflower is succeeding at a time when many rural hospitals in the U.S. are struggling to survive. It serves as a lifeline in a county where nearly 40 percent of residents are living in poverty and in a state with some of the highest levels of obesity, diabetes and deaths from cardiovascular disease in the nation.

And it has helped keep the tiny town of Ruleville afloat. It opened eye and dental clinics, a gift shop, a diagnostic center and a hospice in downtown stores, many of which had been vacant and in disrepair. The 25-bed hospital also sponsors fundraisers for the local high school sports teams and supports area colleges and events, including the Great Ruleville Roast & Run in late September.

North Sunflower isn't immune to the problems plaguing its peers. Its costs are going up at a time when its reimbursements aren't. Medicare, Medicaid and private insurers are cutting their payments and taking longer to send the checks. After years of growth, it may have to rethink some of the services it offers.

"It's a daily struggle and it's getting harder," said Billy Marlow, North Sunflower's executive director who engineered the turnaround.

Marlow had no background in health care when, in 2004, he was asked to join the board

and help save the hospital. Born at North Sunflower and raised in the area, he was a real estate developer and farmer. Soon after, he was named board chairman and then interim administrator.

It didn't take long for him to realize North Sunflower had to develop sources of revenue outside the core hospital. One of his first moves was to relocate the health clinic to a more prominent spot along the road and extend the hours. It's now open from 8 a.m. to midnight every day and treats 3,500 patients a month, up from 120 in 2004. It saves the hospital and patients money by absorbing those who show up at the emergency room but don't need that high a level of care.

The clinic is now a profit center, as is the hospice, pharmacy and durable medical equipment facility that sells items such as wheelchairs, back and knee braces, home oxygen equipment and blood sugar monitors. Marlow opened or expanded all of these.

Another top priority was renovating the hospital itself. The rooms were old, some of the ceilings were crumbling and the technology was outdated. This led both patients and doctors to avoid the place.

"When you have a hospital that's dirty or has a bad image, you can't recruit," said Marlow, who credits the employees and administrators for the rejuvenation.

To help fund all the changes, Marlow converted North Sunflower to a critical access hospital, a federal designation aimed at keeping rural providers alive. The shift increased the medical center's Medicare reimbursements.

A federal loan and a county bond helped pay for a new surgical unit and the Beacon Wellness Center, which contains a sleep clinic, community gym and rehab programs. And Marlow sold the hospital's home health aide agency, stashing away \$2 million in the bank. Marlow also secured some creative financing. He negotiated a deal with GE to provide new X-ray equipment and a CT scanner. And he hired an outside company to overhaul and upgrade the hospital's rooms and paid off the bill over time.

Along with all internal changes, the hospital developed extensive marketing campaigns. Its slogan, Take me to Ruleville, is everywhere—on billboards and bumper stickers, wrapped around its shuttle vans, in TV advertisements and YouTube videos.

Area residents have noticed. North Sunflower received higher than average ratings from patients on a variety of quality measures, according to Medicare's Hospital Compare profile. Some 83 percent of patients said they would "definitely recommend" the medical center, compared to an average of 70 percent for Mississippi hospitals and 72 percent nationwide.

Many area residents said they started coming to North Sunflower's clinic when it opened about a decade ago, not realizing it had existed for years before. Now, they travel miles to see doctors there, bypassing closer hospitals along the way.

Doctors are interested in working at North Sunflower. In recent years, it has added an array of specialists—an orthopedic surgeon, podiatrist, pediatric hematologist, among others—who visit anywhere from once a month to a few times a week. A licensed social worker

now provides adolescent and family counseling at the clinic. And its outpatient cardiac rehab unit just received industry accreditation.

Attracting and retaining quality staff to practice in the Delta is also a challenge. North Sunflower pays its doctors top dollar—often more than what they'd make in bigger cities—and covers a portion of their medical school loans.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing North Sunflower Medical Center for its dedication to serving and giving back to the community.

#### RECOGNIZING TIMOTHY HOLABIRD

#### HON. DOUG LAMALFA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 29, 2018*

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, on behalf of myself and Mr. McClintock, to honor the life and service of Timothy Holabird, a man well known for his dedication to the constituents of Northern California. Mr. Holabird served as Mr. MCCLINTOCK's, and later as my, District Representative.

Mr. Holabird has been recognized by many of the citizens and leaders in our communities for his contributions while serving as the local Representative to Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra Counties. In his capacity, Mr. Holabird worked for the people, finding resolution for the constituent wronged by our federal government. His tenacity to do good by the people, and his endless drive to ensure federal agencies were staying true to their objectives and mission, would quickly tire the average person out. But not so for Mr. Holabird. He was always available to hear the local citizen's concerns, walk them through possible solutions, and ready to fight on their behalf.

Mr. Holabird also had an in-depth knowledge of public lands policy, and a knack for understanding the appropriate role of an agency in relation to state and local needs. With his friendly demeanor, he could get all parties to the table, establish common goals, and ensure the actual problems were being resolved. One instance that comes to mind, was back in 2012, when four devastating wild fires burned through the District. Mr. Holabird personally bridged the communication gap with agencies attacking the fires and the communities immediately threatened, ensuring both homes and lives were saved. He pursued the concerns of local leaders, and addressed the shortfall of resources with federal agencies to the point of his own physical exhaustion.

It is with sadness for his loss of life I rise today. Tim was a friend who I will miss dearly. But I will always remember our drives through that amazing, soul-filling back country we are blessed to represent, where Tim knew most all the people, and could recite the history of each community we passed. It was more history than I could remember in one sitting but I loved it, as we all do in sharing his passion for our country and our NorCal home. God bless him and we know he will be missed by many.